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The Newsletter of the Municipal Excellence Network

ISSUE #8
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2006 Minister's Awards for Municipal Excellence

Honourable Rob Renner *(Minister, Municipal Affairs) with* **Deputy Mayor Joe Patterson** *(Town of Black Diamond), and* **Lou Patterson** *(FCSS Coordinator, Town of Black Diamond).*

Former Minister Rob Renner presented the 2006 awards at the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMD&C) conventions. Congratulations to the following recipients:

Outstanding Achievement Award:
CITY OF EDMONTON
The City of Edmonton saved up to 15 million litres per day of fresh water from the North Saskatchewan River. It achieved this by partnering with Petro Canada to provide high quality recycled water from the Gold Bar Wastewater Treatment Plant to its refinery on the city's eastern outskirts. Advanced treatment technologies at the plant include a membrane filtration system that gives a "final polish" to the wastewater effluent channelled to the Petro Canada refinery.

Innovation Award:
CITY OF MEDICINE HAT
Using GIS technology (geographic information systems), the City of Medicine Hat developed a computer-mapping methodology to predict flood impacts with greater accuracy. The program correlates local water levels with actual river discharge values from Alberta Environment to give a visual representation of potential flood impacts. This gives disaster services staff valuable information for emergency response planning.

Honourable Mention:
COUNTY OF ATHABASCA NO. 12
Through an innovative partnership agreement, the County provided its residents and those of the town of Athabasca, the village of Boyle and the summer villages in the region with affordable, reliable and wireless high-speed internet. The new service is 50 to 200 times faster than dial-up.

Partnership Award:
STRATHCONA COUNTY COMMUNITY DRUG AND ALCOHOL STRATEGY
This 14-partner initiative developed a team-oriented, sustainable approach to combat drug abuse in the county, building on the programs of the different agencies already operating in the region (for a full list of partners, go to www.menet.ab.ca and look under "Minister's Awards"). The strategy combines education, prevention, early intervention and enforcement efforts.

Municipal Excellence network
Municipalities **sharing knowledge** *to excel*

Honourable Mention:
JOINT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (JEDI)
The City of Wetaskiwin, the County of Wetaskiwin and the Town of Millet teamed up to create the JEDI, a one-stop development shop for developers, investors, businesses and the community. Through its revenue-sharing agreement, JEDI promotes healthy regional economic growth for the communities and surrounding area.

Smaller Municipalities Award:
TOWN OF BLACK DIAMOND
Black Diamond's WHEN (wellness, health, exercise and nutrition) program brings seniors together three times each week for fun and fellowship. This helps them get more out of their later years by offering them opportunities for community involvement. Under this initiative, seniors are able to participate in volunteer work, and are informed about community support services.

Honourable Mention:
VILLAGE OF BRETON
The Village of Breton is engaging citizens in the political process through the establishment of two youth and two seniors advisory positions. These four representatives participate in council discussions on matters that impact them. The practice has resulted in stronger community support and increased political interest throughout the community.

THANK YOU TO THE AWARDS SELECTION COMMITTEE:
Councillor Carolyn Kolebaba (AAMDC)
Councillor Ken Hoppins (AAMDC)
Councillor Iris Callioux (AUMA)
Alderman Helen A. Rice (AUMA)
Duane L. Coleman (ARMAA)
Terry Hurlbut (LGAA)
Farrell O'Malley (LGAA)
Tony Martens (SLGM)
Michael Minchin (GFOA)
Darcy Ferguson (GFOA)
Coral Callioux (MA&H)

Announcements, Announcements!

Staffing Changes
Victoria Brown, program manager, accepted a position in the newly created strategic projects unit in Municipal Affairs and Housing. Michael Stansberry, Municipal Excellence advisor, is on secondment to Alberta Justice and Attorney General.

Current MEnet team
Chris Belke, manager; Mike Sandford, MEnet advisor; Kristin Lewis, MEnet advisor; and Travis Nosko, MEnet analyst.

Fall Conventions
MEnet staff attended the fall 2006 AUMA and AAMD&C conventions and were pleased to meet and renew acquaintances with many of you there. Thanks to AUMA and AAMD&C for once again putting on excellent conferences, and thanks for your continued interest in MEnet as we continue to improve the program with your input and support.

If you attended the Minister's Awards for Municipal Excellence, we hope you enjoyed the program. And congratulations once again to all the award recipients.

Keep those practices coming!
MEnet is working hard on the next phase of program development, and welcomes all feedback and suggestions for improvement. MEnet is a knowledge sharing network and to ensure that there is something new and valuable for all municipalities, we need you to continue to contribute practices and resources.

MEnet staff would be pleased to assist you, whether you are new to the website and program or have been a stakeholder for some time. We can be reached at (780) 427-2225 or **menet@gov.ab.ca**

Municipally Excellent Folks

Norbert Van Wyk, *former city manager with the City of Red Deer, retired at the end of 2006. He spent many years in local government, first as an assistant finance controller for the City of London, Ontario, and later as city manager for St. Albert and Red Deer. As he describes it, "I found my niche in local government and I haven't looked back since." re:source asked him to share some final thoughts with us before he retired*

What are the most significant changes you have seen over the course of your career?
Compared to 20 or 30 years ago, the biggest change is the overall complexity of local government. This is mostly a result of legislation, and other requirements including environmental, freedom of information and privacy legislation, development standards and electronic records management, to name a few. I am not being critical, but the result is more complexity for municipalities. Keeping up with rapid growth is challenging too, especially since municipal property tax bases are not enough to finance municipal expenditures. The federal and provincial governments have income tax that grows along with economic growth. This doesn't happen with the assessment base, so instead we have to increase property taxes. Intermunicipal issues are another challenge. Right now we are having difficulties resulting from the elimination of regional planning commissions in the 1990s. Alberta has a policy vacuum in this area and it is creating intermunicipal strife.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for municipalities?
We have an opportunity to capitalize on growth for municipalities and the province. Alberta can become a leader in a range of issues such as growth and development, medical and health, science and technology, and infrastructure programs.

What role do you see MEnet playing in the continued success of Alberta's municipalities?
I first learned about MEnet at a workshop in Leduc when the concept began. I think it is a hugely innovative and successful program for Alberta Municipal Affairs. It has really helped municipalities: they do not have to reinvent the wheel and they do not hesitate to share what they are doing. I receive calls from other provinces about issues, and I refer them to MEnet. I also use MEnet myself and encourage staff and others by referring them to it. It has grown into a significant resource. This culture of sharing through MEnet is a fantastic approach. The program should continue to build up the resources and municipalities should take the time to contribute.

Would you encourage young people to consider careers in municipal government or administration? What attributes or skills will they need?
I speak to young people and I tell them there are real opportunities in the municipal sector. With all the variety, you can work, learn and grow all in one organization. In Red Deer, the city offers great opportunities for talented youth. We support them and help them grow by offering a broad range of experiences, and we provide a very good work environment for talented people with the energy and ambition to move ahead.

What does it take to have a successful career of this sort?
First, you need to have an interest in the community. If you have that interest, the work is extremely satisfying. There are challenges, but that is what makes it rewarding. You can have a positive impact in the community, but you need a passion to make a difference, to improve the community and the province.

Who were some of the most important influences for your career?
The many mentors I always sought out—the ones I spent time chatting with at lunches and breaks—and all the people that I connected with had a large influence on me. It was important to be able to discuss issues and business with other individuals, it helped me be more productive.

Is there a specific accomplishment in your career that you are most proud of?
In both Red Deer and St. Albert, I had a unique opportunity to support the managers and staff and to watch them achieve success. When this happens, then I have also achieved success. It is the team that counts, and getting things done together.

Considering that so many municipal employees are at or nearing retirement, do you have any suggestions or advice for them?
You need to have a plan. My wife and I have planned for our retirement. Specifically, I committed to Red Deer

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for 10 years and am now in my ninth year, so the plan is unfolding. We will be moving back to St. Albert where we raised our family and still have many connections. When you retire, just like in the workplace, you need goals to keep you on track. You need to know how to fill your time. Today, with the labour shortage, there are many opportunities to continue contributing meaningfully into retirement. Look at your own profession or work, and seek out a mentor for advice. Treat retirement as your work life.

In closing, are there any other comments you would like to add?
I have really enjoyed what I have done and the people, including those at Municipal Affairs, have been valuable to me both in my professional and personal growth. Having support, sharing ideas with others—it all made my job easier. That is what is unique about municipal government. I value this relationship, and I hope to maintain it in retirement.

Norbert is looking forward to a change of pace in retirement, but he is not slowing down. He plans to spend more time with his wife and family, although he will remain involved in board work with the Workers' Compensation Board and as a volunteer with the provincial PEER Network. He also plans to lend his expertise to AUMA task forces and committees.

Thanks Norbert, and from all of us here at MEnet, is has been a pleasure to work with you! Best wishes for your retirement.

Regional Presentations for Spring 2007

This spring, MEnet staff plan to visit a number of communities to present an overview of the program, the website, practice creation and other related items. In these half-day sessions, municipalities will discover how MEnet can benefit municipal staff and councils by fostering the sharing of practices and ideas, and increasing networking opportunities.

You can get involved by attending or hosting a regional session. Hosting a session generally involves reserving a space and sending an e-mail invitation to your municipal colleagues.

If you are interested in hosting a session, or attending one, please contact MEnet at (780) 427-2225, send your email to **menet@gov.ab.ca**, or call toll free at 310-0000.

Tangible Capital Assets

By 2009, municipalities will be expected to include tangible capital assets (TCA) in their financial reporting. With the 2009 deadline fast approaching, MEnet has teamed up with the Government Finance Officers of Alberta (GFOA), as well as Municipal Affairs and Housing Financial Advisory Services, to provide municipalities with information regarding the TCA project.

The "Hot Topics" [http://www.menet.ab.ca/539.asp] section of the MEnet web site contains information from the Government of Alberta, the Chartered Accountants of Canada and other provinces that are implementing similar programs. MEnet is committed to providing as much support as possible and will continue to post new information and resources on the "Hot Topics" page as it becomes available. In addition MEnet is currently working with the GFOA to find new ways to communicate updates and offer support thought the MEnet web site. Look for updates on **www.menet.ab.ca** and in the next edition of *re:source*.

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Legislative

The Newsletter of the Municipal Excellence

2007 Minister's Award for

2008

Municipal Excellence